



## Review Article

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**IMPORTANCE OF MADHU IN AYURVEDA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HONEY: A REVIEW**

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**ABSTRACT**

Madhu (Honey) is described in Ayurveda classical text in detail. It is necessary to study all this information comparatively and critically for the proper use of Honey. Synonyms, origin, type, properties and therapeutic as well as nutritional use of Honey are described in Ayurveda text in detail. Data is collected from Brihatrayi and other Ayurveda texts and presented in different tables. The explanation is given about various descriptions in different Ayurveda texts. The present study aims to review information about madhu in different Ayurveda texts and clarify its importance. After the study, it is clear that Honey is an important natural helpful substance for a healthy and diseased person.

**Keywords:** Madhu, Ayurveda, Honey**INTRODUCTION**

Various properties and uses of Madhu (Honey) are described in Ayurveda. Honey is important as food as well as medicine. Also, it has religious significance.<sup>1</sup>

“Honey is the sweet liquid prepared by bees for their use but robbed by a man. Many bee varieties are different in size, colour, and habitat. Some dwell in forests and build their home (hives) attached to the branches of tall trees; some build them inside the crevices of the trees; they are also seen attached to the roofs of tall buildings, inside the cracks of the walls etc. Generally, large and medium-sized brown-coloured bees build big combs (hives), while small-sized, slightly blackish bees build their home inside the crevices and hollows of trees and buildings. The bees go from flower to flower, dip their sharp proboscis into them, suck the sweet liquid (nectar), and store them in a special sac inside their mouth. After returning to their hive in the evening, they bring out the sweet nectar and deposit it inside the small chambers of the comb. Thus, they build a ready food store for use in the rainy season. Man, lured by its sweetness, drives away the Bees forcibly and collects the Honey, not caring even the poisonous solid sting of the enraged bees. Nowadays, beekeeping has come into vogue; wooden hives are provided to them inside the gardens, and honey collected periodically without harming the bees or being harmed by them.

Honey is a very sweet, thick liquid, varying in colour from dark brown to light yellow. The sweetness and thickness also vary depending upon the region, type of flowers bees feed on, season and the variety of the bees. Honey is a mixture of nectar and pollen of flowers.<sup>2</sup>

Data were collected for the present study from different Ayurvedic Samhita, commentaries and textbooks, Articles published in various journals and from a few search engines. Collected data was presented in multiple tables according to different Acharyas and discussed.

**The etymology of madhu:** Madhu is derived from “Manyat iti madhu”, meaning sweet, delicious and pleasant.<sup>3</sup>

**Synonyms of madhu in Ayurveda:** Madhu, Makshika, Madhvika, Kshaudra saragh, makshikavant, Varativant, Bhringavant, Pushparasodbhav.<sup>4</sup>

**Scientific classification of Honeybee:** ‘Honeybee’ belongs to Animal Kingdom, Phylum- Arthropoda, Class- Insecta, Order- Hymenoptera, Family- Apidae, Genus- Apis, Species- Mellifera, cerana with Binomial name- *Apis mellifera*, *Apis cerana* etc.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Properties of madhu according to different acharyas<sup>5-11</sup>**

	Charaka Samhita Sutrasthan 27/245	Sushruta Samhita Sutrasthan 45/132	Ashtanga Samgraha Sutrasthan 6/92,95	Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrasthan 5/52	Bhavaprakasa Nighantu Madhu Varga 2-5
Rasa	Madhur Kashaya	Madhur	Madhur Kashaya	Madhur Kashaya	Madhur
Anurasa		Kashaya			
Guna	Guru Ruksha	Laghu, Ruksha, Picchil	Guru Ruksha	Ruksha	Laghu, Ruksha, Vishad, Sukshma
Virya	Sheeta	Sheeta	Sheeta	Sheeta	Sheeta
Dosghanta	Vata karak, Kapha Pitta nashak	Tridosh nashak	Vata karak, Kapha Pitta nashak	Vata karak, Kapha Pitta nashak	Alpa vatlam, Kapha Pitta nashak

**Properties of pakva apakva madhu:** Pakva honey (ripen) mitigates tridosh, while apakva Honey vitiates tridosh and tastes sour. Here pakva and apakva depend upon time. This means if Honey is used after, it remains for some duration.<sup>12</sup>

**The unique property of madhu:** Honey is one of the best yogvahi substances explained in Ayurved, i.e., without changing its properties, it carries and enhances the properties of the drug added to it.<sup>13</sup>

**Properties of fresh (nav) and old (puran) Honey:** Fresh Honey is brihaniya means which nourishes the body, does not decrease Kapha very much and has sara (laxative) properties. Old Honey reduces fat and obesity, constipating and highly scraping.<sup>14</sup>

Honey used after one year is called old (puran); before that, it is considered fresh (nav).<sup>15</sup>

**Explanation about action on dosha according to different Acharyas:** Acharya Sushruta describes Honey as tridosh shamak, but Acharya Charaka and Acharya Vagbhata describe it as increasing Vata and decreasing Kapha Pitta. Commentator Acharya Hemadri explained that when Vata vitiated along with Pitta, or Kapha or madhu is used with Vata shamak dravya; it works as tridosh shamak. Otherwise, when there is only Vata vitiating and if madhu is used without mixing any other dravya, it increases Vata.<sup>16</sup>

Also, Acharya Charaka mentioned Honey as a guru (heavy), and Acharya Sushruta described laghu (light). Here madhu has guru guna, but its vipak has laghu property. Guru guna means it requires more time for digestion. Laghu vipak means it obstructs stool and urine after digestion and increases Vata.

Table 2: Varieties of madhu according to different acharyas<sup>17-20</sup>

	Charaka Samhita Sutrasthan 27/243	Sushruta Samhita Sutrasthan 45/133	Ashtanga Samgraha Sutrasthan 6/98	Bhavaprakasa Nighantu Madhu varga 6
Varieties	4	8	4	8
Pauttika	+	+	+	+
Bhramara	+	+	+	+
Kshaudra	+	+	+	+
Makshika	+	+	+	+
Chhatra	-	+	-	+
Aarghya	-	+	-	+
Auddalaka	-	+	-	+
Dala	-	+	-	+

Table 3: Description of madhu according to types<sup>21-33</sup>

Varieties	Honeybee	Honey properties and uses
Pauttika	Small black bee resembles mosquito and builds their home inside hollows of trees.	Ghee-like colour, especially ruksh (dry) and ushna (hot) aggravates Vata, Rakta and Pitta; chedi (cuts tissues); produces heartburn and intoxication.
Bhramara	Popular common bees have white colour and medium size	Guru (not easily digested) because of its picchil (slimy) and ati swadu (excessively sweet) properties. Rakta- Pitta shamak.
Kshaudra	Small brown bee	Brownish colour, especially Sheet (cold), laghu (easy to digest) and lekhan (sacrificing); especially useful in Prameh disease.
Makshika	Brown in colour and big	Oil-like colour; laghu (easy to digest), ruksha, best qualities, useful in Asthma, Kamala, Arsha, Kshata and Kasa disease.
Chhatra	The brown colour makes umbrella-shaped hives in forests.	Brown, yellow; madhur vipak, guru (heavy to digest), sheeta (cold) and picchil (slimy); useful in Raktapitta, Shwitra, Prameha, and Krumi disease.
Aarghya	These bees make Honey from Madhuka ( <i>Madhuca indica</i> ) trees, which have sharp mouths and are yellow.	White in colour; kashaya (astringent), katu vipak (pungent after digestion); eliminates vitiating kapha and pitta dosha. balya (strengthening) and beneficial for the eyes.
Auddalaka	Small brown bees which store Honey inside ant hills	Yellowish brown, kashaya (astringent) and amla rasa (sour); katu (pungent) vipaka (after digestion); aggravates Pitta; useful in Kushta and to improve swara (voice)
Dala	Drops of honey fall from the flower on the surface of the leaf	Pink in colour; ruksha (dry), sweet, sour and astringent in taste, useful in vomiting and Prameh.

### General therapeutic uses of Honey

Honey, in general, is the aggravator of vata, an alleviator of Raktapitta and Kapha. It promotes healing.<sup>34</sup>

Honey is good for the eyes. It breaks up the solidified material inside the body.

It is indicated in thirst, Kapha, poisonous disorders, hiccoughs, and bleeding disorders. Cures Prameha, skin disorders, worm infestations, vomiting, Shwas (Dyspnea), Kasa (cough), and Atisar (Diahorea). Cleans and heals the wounds and unifies fractures.<sup>35</sup>

Honey kindles digestion is good for colour and voice, bestows softness to the body, is good for the heart, is aphrodisiac, unites fractures, cleanses and heals wounds, is suitable for vision, cleanses the eyes, enters in minute channels, useful in diarrhoea,

vomiting, thirst worms and poison; bestows happiness and mitigates all the three doshas.<sup>36</sup>

When we review Ayurveda Brihatrayi (Greater trio), it is noticed that many compound medicine of Ayurveda has Honey as an ingredient.

**Precaution for honey consumption:** Honey should not be used after heating as the poisonous bees have collected it from flowers with different tastes, qualities and potencies.<sup>37</sup>

Hence the person dominated by pitta, mixed with hot substances in the summer season and the area where the temperature is so high should not use Honey as it can kill them quickly, similar to poison.

But the Honey can be used after heating in therapeutic procedures like emesis and medicated enemata with decoctions as it comes out of the body quickly without digestion.

## CONCLUSION

Detail description of Honey is present in classical Ayurveda text. Honey is an important natural helpful substance for a healthy and diseased person. Honey is the best yogvahi drug. Honey is mainly helpful in treating Kapha dosha vitiation. Different types of Honey are explained in Ayurved with their properties. Honey is an important ingredient of many Ayurveda medicine compounds.

Honey is useful separately as a single drug and in combination with different medicine used internally and externally.

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